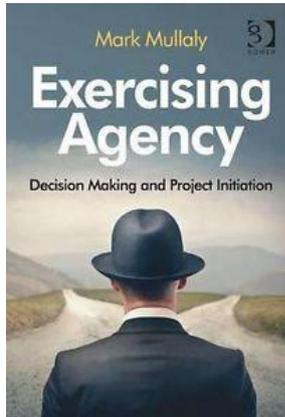


## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Exercising Agency: Decision Making and Project Initiation***

Author: **Mark Mullaly**

Publisher: Gower Publishing

List Price: \$109.95      Format: hard cover, 192 pages

Publication Date: 2015      ISBN: 978-1-4724-2788-5

Reviewer: **Newton F (Butch) Freeland**

Review Date: June 2015

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### Introduction

This book is a well thought out and well documented analysis of decision making as it applies to project initiation. He begins with an excellent discussion of general decision theory. The remainder of the book explores various decision making processes and their influence on project initiation and ultimate success.

He makes the claim early that “The up-front process of initiation has been identified as having a dominate influence in determining the success or failure of individual project efforts.” This excellent book then develops the issues (see Format above) pertaining to the influence of various decision making processes on the success of projects.

### Overview of Book’s Structure

The introduction discusses the purpose of the book, a discussion on various decision making processes and an introduction to the chapters in the book.

The second chapter discusses project initiation challenges, how individuals attempt to influence projects, etc. This chapter frames the problem the book is trying to solve. Chapters three through seven discuss in detail those elements of decision making and their influence on the success of the project.

Chapters eight through ten are the guidance chapters. They provide guidance, based on previous discussions, to:

- project shapers – those who are attempting to get a project underway,
- executives who must evaluate and making the decision whether or not to proceed
- How to improve the effectiveness of project initiation

## Highlights

The book is very well organized and leads the reader logically from problem identification through the development of the various issues that influence project initiation and to guidance aimed at improving project initiation and performance.

By beginning with decision theory the author lays a firm foundation for the rest of his analysis and recommendations. He then builds on those concepts as he develops the discussions about challenges to project initiation such as the influences of politics, process and individuals.

Essential to understanding the book is the author's understanding of agency. On page 51 he develops the concept of Agency starting with the following quote:

*“Agency has a fundamental influence on decision effectiveness in all contexts. Agency reflects intention, ability and capacity to act – along with a corresponding level of awareness – on the part of individual actors within the rule environment, and their willingness to work within, around or despite the dominant rule system. Agency can work to support the influences of process effectiveness or rule effectiveness, and agency can also override and compensate for organizational inadequacies.....”*

The Author's definition of agency!

## Highlights: What I liked!

The logical organization of the book made it easy to follow his arguments.

I appreciated his explanation that project initiation decisions live in middle space between strategy development and project management. It takes a well thought out project initiation for the project management function to have a chance of accomplishing the strategic objectives of the company.

I also liked his thorough discussion about the need for process driven decisions to obtain good initiation decisions. This is tempered by the discussion of agency as a means to evaluate and work outside the rules when necessary.

## Who might benefit from the Book

Any project manager or decision maker – executive, sponsor, stakeholder – would benefit from the concepts and guidance put forth in this well written book.

## Conclusion

Exercising Agency – Decision Making and Project Initiation provides valuable insights to anyone who is involved in project initiation. It also provides an excellent discussion of decision making theory.

The Issues with individuals and politics is also explored in contrast to process driven decision making.

The fact that it is well documented allows the reader to further investigate the concepts that are discussed in this book.

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For more about this book, go to:

<http://www.gowerpublishing.com/default.aspx?page=641&calcTitle=1&isbn=9781472427885&lang=cy-GB>

*Editor's note: This book review was the result of cooperation between the publisher, PM World and the Dallas Chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI Dallas Chapter – [www.pmidallas.org](http://www.pmidallas.org)). Publishers provide the books to PM World; books are delivered to the PMI Dallas Chapter, where they are offered free to PMI members to review; book reviews are published in the PM World Journal and PM World Library. Reviewers can keep the books and claim PDUs for PMP recertification. PMI Dallas Chapter members are generally mid-career professionals, the audience for most project management books.*

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## About the Reviewer



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Newton (Butch) Freeland's background includes US Naval Flight Officer - E-2C operations and T&E, Airborne systems test, systems engineering, business development, international border security and Project management for the past 28 years. Systems have included UAV, E- 2C, SATCOM, Australian P-3 weapons upgrade, SeaVue radar, Ukraine border security, and DEA aircraft sensor and communications modifications.